



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 74

YOUR MEDICAL RECORD

A medical record is a chronological history of care received. It includes the documentation of patient visits, reports from specialty consultations, results of diagnostic procedures (mammograms, upper GI series, MRIs, chest and other types of x-rays, etc.), laboratory results and other related items such as vaccinations received. A complete and accurate health record is very important to you, your health care providers and to the Coast Guard as an organization. As time goes by, and more and more medical information is placed in the medical record, it's value increases.

For you, your medical record is very helpful to your medical care and to your health care providers. It may also have some bearing in the future for fitness for duty appraisals or for VA benefits issues. It is YOUR medical history.

For the provider, a medical record is a source of baseline health information. It can be used to determine whether there has been a significant change in a particular aspect of your health. When was the last physical, mammogram, PAP smear, PSA or cholesterol test done? How does it compare with the most current test/procedure result?

As an organization, the Coast Guard can review your filed medical record to quickly assess medical readiness.

Maintenance of a complete medical record is critical, and in large part, your responsibility. Several things should be highlighted:

1. Your medical record should be stored and maintained by the medical records custodian of your unit. The original medical record is the property of the federal government.
2. Most facilities do a good job of ensuring that each and every consult/procedure/test result gets into our medical record. However, as we are a mobile population, there is a chance that some information may get mis-filed or never reach the record. Make certain every patient visit is documented and all lab and x-ray results are in your medical record. This is especially important when seeing civilian providers and others beyond your primary care manager. Copies of all test/procedure results performed outside of the health care facility should be in your medical record. If a report isn't in your medical record, request a copy from the facility that performed the procedure and make sure it is appropriately filed in your

record.

3. While your medical record moves with you, the actual radiographic films (x-rays, mammograms, MRIs, etc.) are generally kept on file at the facility performing the procedure. You may find it useful to obtain copies of the radiographic film, which can be used for comparison when the situation is warranted. For example, you may want to have a copy of your baseline mammogram on-hand to be used for comparison with subsequent mammograms. The facility providing the copy may require a duplication fee. At a minimum, consider keeping a log of when and where (particularly if a civilian facility) such procedures were done. Also include an address and telephone number. Having this information at hand may save you and your provider time should you need to get a copy in the future.

4. The military health care system does not maintain a duplicate copy of your medical record. Should it or any portion of it be lost or destroyed there is no single source for a duplicate. While loss or destruction is uncommon, you may want to protect yourself from this possibility by keeping your own duplicate records for you and your family. You may want to make a copy of all or a part of your medical record (usually on file with your primary care manager) to have for your own files.

5. When you separate or retire from the service, you should also consider making an extra copy of your medical record and submitting it to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), even if you don't have a medical condition requiring treatment or think you are eligible for disability compensation. Submissions must be accompanied by a completed VA Form 21-526 available on-line at <http://www.va.gov/FORMS/>. and can be sent to any DVA regional office. This submission will then enter you into the DVA's system and they will rate your condition at time of separation (even if the rating is zero because there's nothing wrong with you). By doing this, you can preserve any future DVA benefit that may accrue to your service in the Coast Guard. If a service-connected medical condition ever surfaces at a future date, or you wish to apply for some other DVA benefit program, you will already have a record established and processing for subsequent applications for benefits will be accelerated.

Regards, FL Ames

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